3.11 Courses and classes

3.11.1 Subjects of study
Subjects of study – courses – frequently end in xué ‘study; learning’ (cf. xuésheng); however, when a subject consists of two or more syllables, the xué is optional. Here are some examples:

- shùxué (numbers-study) mathematics
- lǐshǐ<xué> history
- wùlǐ<xué> (things-principles) physics
- jīngjī<xué> economics
- wènxué (language-study) literature
- gōngchéng<xué> engineering
- guǎnlǐxué management

Tǐyù ‘physical education’, however, is more ‘sports’ than a subject of study, so it does not usually occur with xué.

3.11.2 Talking about classes

a) Classes, courses, sessions:
Many words function as both nouns and measure words. Kè, for example, as a noun means ‘subject; course’, but as an M, it means ‘lesson’. M’s only appear after numbers (or demonstratives), and are optionally followed by nouns: yī ge <xuésheng>; zhèi ge rén, yī kuài <qián>. But where there is no number (or demonstrative), there will be no measure words:

- Jǐntiān méiyǒu kè. [I] don’t have class today.
- Kè hěn nán. The course/class is tough.
- Méiyǒu pǐjiǔ le. [We]’re out of beer!

Nouns may be counted with different measures, each conveying slightly different nuances. Kè, as a noun meaning ‘subject’ or ‘class’, for example, can be counted with the M mén (whose root-meaning is ‘door’) when the sense is ‘a course’; with jié (root-meaning ‘segment’) or tāng (root-meaning ‘hall’), when the meaning is ‘a class session’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>kè</th>
<th>tánɡ</th>
<th>jié</th>
<th>mén</th>
<th>bān</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as NOUN</td>
<td>subject</td>
<td>hall</td>
<td>segment</td>
<td>door</td>
<td>session; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as M.</td>
<td>lesson</td>
<td>class</td>
<td>class</td>
<td>course/subj</td>
<td>[flight etc.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples
M: mén Zhèi ge xuéqì, nǐ yǒu jǐ mén kè? How many courses do you have this term? / I have four.
N: kè Wǒ yǒu sì mén kè.
N: kè  Jìntiān hái yǒu biéde kè ma?  Do [you] have other classes today?
M: táng  Hái yǒu liàng táng.  I still have two more.

M: jié  Jìntiān yǒu jǐ jié?  How many [classes] today?
N: kè  Jìntiān méiyǒu kè.  I don’t have any classes today.
M: jié  Nà, míngtiān ne, míngtiān yǒu jǐ jié?  Well, what about tomorrow, how many [classes] tomorrow?
N: kè  Jìntiān yǒu kè, kěshí míngtiān méiyǒu!  There’s class today, but not tomorrow.
M: kè  Zhè shì dì-yī kè  This is the first lesson.
M: kè  Yígòng yǒu sānshí kè.  There are 30 lessons altogether.

Besides the noun kè ‘class’, the noun bān, whose root meaning is ‘shift’ or ‘session’ (cf. shàngbān ‘go to work’), is also relevant to the subject of taking classes. Large sessions (or ‘lectures’) are dàbān; small sessions (or ‘sections’) are xiǎobān. These are counted with the general-M, gè:

Yígòng yǒu wǔ ge bān,  [There are] five sessions altogether,
liǎng ge dàbān, sān ge xiǎobān.  2 lectures and 3 sections.

Like kè, bān can also be a M, but not for classes or the like. Bān is common as a M for trips of regularly scheduled transport, such as busses and airplanes: Xīngqìyī-sān-wǔ yǒu yī bān. ‘There’s a flight/bus/train on MWF.’

b) ‘Taking’ classes
In the examples under a), ‘taking a class’ was construed as ‘having a class’: yǒu wǔ mén kè. However, you should be aware that just as English allows the option of saying ‘how many courses do you have’ and ‘how many are you taking’, so Chinese offers options with shàng ‘(attend) take’; and [particularly in Taiwan] xiū ‘(cultivate) take’, along with yǒu ‘have’:

Nǐ zhèi ge xuéqí shàng / yǒu / xiū jǐ mén kè?  How many courses are you taking this semester?
Wǒ shàng / yǒu / xiū wǔ mén.  I’m taking 5.

3.11.3 Moveable adverbs (dāngrán; yídīng)
a) Dāngrán ‘of course’
Dāngrán, like yígòng, is classed as a moveable adverb, because some of the positional requirements of typical adverbs (such as the requirement of a following verb) are relaxed:
Lǐbàiwǔ yòu kè ma? Are there classes on Friday?
Dāngrán, měitiān dōu yòu kè. Of course, there are classes everyday.
Yòu zuòyè ma? Any homework?
Dāngrán yòu zuòyè, měitiān dōu yòu zuòyè. Of course there’s homework, there’s homework everyday!

b) Yìding ‘for certain; for sure’

Xīngqīlìù yìding méi kè ma? Is [it] certain that there’s no class on Sat.?
Xīngqīlìù, xīngqītiān yìding méiyǒu kè. For certain there are no classes on Saturday and Sunday.

Yìding is especially common in the negative, bù yìding ‘not necessarily’, when it often stands alone. Frequently, bù yìding can be followed by a comment beginning with yǒude ‘some’, literally ‘there are some of them [which]’:

Kāoshì dōu hèn nán ma? Are the tests all difficult?
Bù yìding. Yǒude hèn nán, yǒude bù nán! Not necessarily. Some are difficult, some aren’t.

Xuéshēng yìding hèn lèi ma? Are students necessarily always tired?
Bù, làoshī hèn lèi, xuéshēng bù yìding. No, teachers are tired, students aren’t necessarily.

Exercise 9.
Express the following:
1. In all, you’re taking 5 courses this semester, and they’re all hard.
2. In Beijing, November isn’t necessarily cold but July is certainly hot.
3. You have lots of classes on Tuesday and Thursday, but only one on Wednesday.
4. The lecture has 120 students, but the sections only have 12.
5. The mathematics teacher isn’t too strict, but the tests are hard.
6. You don’t have any more classes today.
7. You were nervous yesterday, but you’re okay today.
8. The physics teacher’s very strict, so I’m nervous in class.

3.11.4 Question words as indefinites
Question words in Chinese have two faces: they can function in questions (corresponding to the wh-words of English – ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, etc.), and they can function as indefinites (corresponding to ‘anyone’, ‘anything’, ‘anywhere’, etc.) So shénme, in addition to its interrogative use, can also mean ‘anything’ in a non-interrogative context. The sense is often ‘anything in particular’:
Méi shénme wèntí.  [I] don’t have any questions [in particular].

Méi shénme gōngkè.  [We] don’t have any homework [in particular].

Xièxiè nǐ lái jiě wǒ.  Thanks for coming to pick me up.
Méi shénme. Hěn jìn!  [It]’s nothing – it’s close by.

Duìbuqǐ, nǐ xìng shénme, wǒ wàng le.  Sorry, what was your name – I’ve forgotten.
Méi shénme. Wǒ xìng Zōu.  That’s all right. My surname’s Zou (sic!)

Many more examples of question-words used as indefinites will be encountered in later units.

### 3.12 Dialogue: courses and classes

*Jiǎ and Yǐ are classmates at school, chatting over breakfast before going to class.*

**Jiǎ**

Èi, nǐ hào, jǐntiān zènmeyáng?  Hi, how are you? How’s it going today?

**Yǐ**

Hái hǎo, hái hǎo.  Fine, fine.

**Jiǎ**

Nǐ jǐntiān máng bu máng?  You busy today?

**Yǐ**

Hěn máng.  I am!

**Jiǎ**

Wèishénme?  How come?

**Yǐ**

Yīnwèi yǒu kǎoshì.  Because I have a test.

**Jiǎ**

Yǒu shénme kǎoshì?  What test?

**Yǐ**


**Jiǎ**

Nà míntiān ne?  Well how about tomorrow?

**Yǐ**

Míntiān méiyǒu. Míntiān hái hǎo.  None tomorrow, tomorrow’s fine.

**Jiǎ**

Yǒu gōngkè ma?  Do [you] have any homework?

**Yǐ**

Yǒu, dāngrán yǒu.  Sure, of course [we] do.

**Jiǎ**

Zhōngwén, gōngkè duō bu duō?  Is there a lot of homework in Chinese?

**Yǐ**

Hěn duō, kēshi hěn yóuyìsi!  There’s a lot, but it’s interesting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jiǎ</th>
<th>Hěn nán ba!</th>
<th>It must be difficult.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yǐ</td>
<td>Bú tài nán, hái hǎo.</td>
<td>It’s not so bad, it’s fine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jiǎ</th>
<th>Nǐ hái yǒu shénme biéde kè?</th>
<th>What other classes do you have?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(you still have what other classes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yǐ</td>
<td>Jīntiān, hái yǒu wǔlǐ, shùxué, míngtiān yǒu lǐshí.</td>
<td>I still have physics and maths today, tomorrow I have history.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jiǎ</th>
<th>Zhōngwén měitiān dōu yǒu ma?</th>
<th>Do you have Chinese everyday?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chinese daily all have Q)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yǐ</td>
<td>Xīngqìyī dào sì dōu yǒu, xīngqìwǔ mèiyǒu.</td>
<td>Everyday [from] Monday to Thursday, not on Friday. (Monday to Thurs all have, Friday not-have)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jiǎ</th>
<th>Zhèi ge xuéqí yígòng shàng sì mén kè ma?</th>
<th>You’re taking 4 courses altogether this semester? (‘this M term altogether take…’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yǐ</td>
<td>Yígòng shàng wǔ mén, hái yǒu tiyù. Kēshí tiyù méi shénme gōngkè.</td>
<td>Five altogether; there’s PE as well. But PE doesn’t have any homework.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jiǎ</th>
<th>Wǔ mén kè, yídìng hěn lèi.</th>
<th>Five courses, [you] must be tired!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yǐ</td>
<td>Hái kěyǐ.</td>
<td>[I] manage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Variations:**

**Instead of:** Nǐ jīntiān máng bu máng?

| Jīntiān nǐ jǐn<zhāng> bù jǐnzhāng? | Are you nervous today? |
| Jīntiān nǐ lèi bu lèi? | Are you tired today? |
| Jīntiān hào ma? | Are things okay today? |
| Nǐ shū<fu> bù shūfu? | Are you comfortable? |

**Instead of:** Yǒu kāoshí.

| Yǒu gōngkè. | There’s/[we] have homework |
| Yǒu zuòyè. | There’s/[we] have an assignment. |
| Yǒu báogào. | There’s/[we] have a report. |
| Yǒu shíyán. | There’s/[we] have a lab. |
Exercise 10.
Here are some sentences written by students learning Chinese; identify the likely mistakes and explain (if you can); then correct them.

1. *Wǒmen hái méi chī le.
3. *Zhōu, nǐ è bu è?
5. *Chī fàn le ma? / Hái méi ne? / Wǒ yě. (‘Me neither!’)
7. *Míngtiān shèmme kǎoshi nǐ yǒu?
